10: Sen K-3, 4 (ca. 1955) 1962 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

INTRODUCTION

A group of north-south running islands as they are, the Andaman Islands have as many as 204 small islands where the impact of civilisation and growth has been little and the human history has been one of stagnation rather than of chequered career. Being a land of aborigines, the foreign intrusion has been quite feeble though mention about these islands is found in the early records of the travellers. Though the knowledge about the islands is derived from the notes which date back to 2nd Century A.D., the contacts with the foreigners have been all the time transient and extremely feeble. Before the formation of the penal settlement, the islands have been known as an island of horror because of the presence of such tribal people who would eat up the man they encounter and as regards the wealth there has been imaginary illusion, sometimes being called as the Island of Gold. The historical record of the islands which can be built with a fair degree of precision is since the formation of the penal settlement. There has been the search for resources as well as their exploitation. However, all the attempts for finding minerals and the geological explorations have shown the possibility of the existence of some poor quality coal, copper etc. Virtually there has been a conspicuous lack of efforts for the development of the islands. The penal settlement which grew up in Port Blair did not have any considerable influence on the overall development of the islands. Nevertheless with the more intimate knowledge about the islands, the forest exploitation had increased and the land around Port Blair was cleared for agriculture. The little amount of agriculture that was started and fostered by the local-borns in and around Port Blair never expanded considerably and it remained confined to a few areas of South Andaman only. The aborigines were very much widespread and in the beginning they had exercised hostility and arrogance which had in course of time given place to a very friendly and amicable terms with some of the tribal groups i.e. the Onges and the Andamanese. The Jarawas, however, still now maintain their hostility and the attempts for bringing them under amicable terms have so long proved futile.

Nothing more deserves a special note in the islands than the aboriginal population. Because of the insular nature of the islands, the aboriginal population is considered to be one of the purest type though the foreign intrusion has brought about an extremely rapid impoverishment and decay only during the last few decades of contact with these aborigines.

6:Spate N-4 (no date)1954 AWI India
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mariners from massacre. Despite efforts at conciliation there was violence on both sides; attempts were made indeed to settle some of the more friendly groups in an 'Andamans Home' as fishers of trepang (sea-slug) and collectors of edible bird-nests, both for the Chinese market. But the only result was to civilise them out of existence, largely by venereal disease.[52] The Andamanese are—perhaps one should say were—Negritos, and as they represented perhaps the nearest approach to a 'pure primitive' society, both ethnically and culturally, these hunters and gatherers have attracted anthropological attention out of proportion to their numbers.[53]

Transportation of convicts to the Andamans began after the Mutiny. Latterly there was a change of emphasis, hopeless criminals being re-transported to India and the settlement becoming in effect an open prison for young men condemned to life sentences for more or less excusable homicide. After a few months in jail convicts were allowed to become wage-earning employees of Government, to wear ordinary dress, and to marry or bring out their wives. These changes were reflected in the sex composition of the population: 15,158 males to 2980 females in 1901, 14,872 to 6444 in 1941. The cultural landscape also changed: "Everywhere the ephemeral huts of former times are giving way to well-constructed two-storeyed houses of sawn timber and iron roofs," and a good deal of reclamation of malarial swamp took place around Port Blair. The communal composition of the population was an odd reflection of social conditions: in 1941 Muslims were about a third, largely Moplahs from Madras deported after their 1921 rebellion; Sikhs were 3·5% against an All-India total of 1·5%, Buddhists—i.e. Burmese—over 13%. This corresponds to the prevalence of dacoity in Burma and to the Sikh *penchant* for "liquor, love, and fights".

Practically all the economic development is in the Settlement of Port Blair, an area of about 500 sq mls in the S of South Andaman; here is 90% of the population, the remainder being in forest camps. About 75,000 ac. are more or less cleared, of which about 10–15,000 are cultivated and as much grazing land. Paddy and coconuts each account for about a third of the cultivation, and there are (or were) struggling plantations of rubber and coffee, negligible in area.

The war and the Japanese occupation saw a fall in population to about 16,000, and on re-occupation the penal settlement was formally abolished. From time to time schemes of Anglo-Indian agricultural settlement have been mooted, and in March 1948 a batch of 132 families displaced from E Bengal arrived. It may be noted that some Burmese politicians periodi-

[52] 1931 Census Vol. II (Andamans and Nicobars), 11–23.

[53] The classic treatments are those of Sir Richard Temple in the 1901 Census and of A. R. Brown in *The Andaman Islanders* (1922). There is unfortunately little geography in the latter book; what there is is largely summed up in L. Garrard's 'sociograph' in *Studies in Regional Consciousness and Environment* (ed. I. C. Peate, 1930), 82.